



Requalification of Suburbs and Regulatory Frameworks: Current Situation and Easing Measures

This report presents the results of an analysis of regulations likely to influence the regeneration of first ring suburbs, i.e. Les Rivières, Sainte-Foy-Sillery, Beauport and Charlesbourg. This research, based in the Quebec City region, is designed to shed some light on how normative federal, provincial and municipal regulations can interfere with urban requalification.

More particularly, this analysis takes stock of applicable regulatory frameworks at a range of governance levels and intervention scales, illustrates the impact of certain regulations on urban renewal criteria, identifies various impediments to suburban requalification and finally, proposes easing measures and makes recommendations.

Implemented regulations are contextualized and illustrated in the report. One example, at the provincial level, are development standards near major infrastructures—highways, railways, hydro-electric corridors—that limit the possibilities of relieving the isolation of neighbourhoods by rehabilitating permeability and accessibility links between them. At the municipal level, the report highlights zoning (use and subdivision standards) that can limit the density of residential areas by prohibiting the addition of accessory apartments to single-family homes.

As a follow-up to the analysis of urban planning projects in suburban Quebec City, the examples of regulatory implementation illustrate the difficulties engendered by regulatory inertia in a context of physically and socially adapting existing communities.

CONTEXT AND DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

The first ring suburbs of Quebec City were selected for this study. The study was conducted by the Laval University's Interdisciplinary Research Group on Suburbs (GRI :).

The primary characteristics of these communities, which were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, are the predominance of detached bungalows and zoning that segregates residential functions from commercial and industrial functions. These suburbs are also characterized by the omnipresence of a network of highways, urban parkways and collector roads that often isolate neighbourhoods. Although these suburbs were originally characterized by their relatively homogeneous nature, they have since diversified (population, lifestyles) and been transformed. A series of questions results from this observation: How can these neighbourhoods be made attractive to new residents, while adapting them to current needs? How can consolidation (physical, social, financial) be the focus as an alternative to urban sprawl? The study proposes an answer: developing expert intervention to update these aging communities to halt their depopulation, together with the obsolescence of their housing supply and infrastructures.

In that regard, to what extent does design regulation encourage or hinder intervention? By bringing hypotheses and concrete requalification criteria face to face with the regulatory context that would frame these transformations, this research helps assess the degree of regulatory flexibility and proposes a few easing measures.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research strategy has three primary components: (1) an inventory of regulatory frameworks applicable to suburban requalification, at a range of governance levels and intervention scales; (2) an audit of the impact of different regulatory frameworks in connection with concrete proposals for updating first ring suburbs; and (3) formulation of recommendations designed to ease certain regulations, policies or standards that are hindering the adaptation of existing communities.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inventory and Implementation Scales

An inventory of development and building regulations at the three levels of government reveals five categories of framework: (1) legislation, codes and charters; (2) regulations and codes; (3) Orientation or action plans, government policies and priorities; (4) financial or material assistance programs; and (5) intervention codes, standards and guides. Various types of regulations have areas of application regarding intervention scales: urban areas, city and neighbourhood, street and buildings.

Implemented regulations are contextualized and illustrated in the report. One example, at the provincial level, are development standards near major infrastructures—highways, railways, hydro-electric corridors—that limit the possibilities of relieving the isolation of neighbourhoods by rehabilitating permeability and accessibility links between them. At the municipal level, the report highlights zoning (use and subdivision standards) that can limit the density of residential areas by prohibiting the addition of accessory apartments to single-family homes. The report examines seven requalification standards resulting from urban planning projects in suburban Québec City; the examples of regulatory implementation illustrate the difficulties engendered by regulatory inertia in a context of physically and socially adapting existing communities.

Easing Mechanisms

After consultation based on the Québec City case, easing mechanisms for the most restrictive regulations and the implementation of recommendations are well underway.

First, as regards the regulation of zoning and subdivision, these would include: (1) design of a regulation fostering densification and consolidation of suburbs pursuant to a harmonious diversity of uses and residential classifications; (2) easing of parking requirements for densification, recycling and revitalization projects in strategic areas; and (3) focus on tools such as Special Planning Programs (SPPs) to support priority requalification projects, with contextually adapted regulations and standards, as well as revitalization incentives.

In acquiring public properties for consolidation purposes, an easing is required of the ministerial approval process concerning exchanges and acquisitions of public lands (such as school board properties) or the recycling of institutional buildings (such as schools).

As regards the environment and transportation alternatives, the report's recommendations include: (1) maintaining and strengthening environmental regulations and standards at the provincial and municipal level; (2) ensuring correlation, at every governance level, between the planning and consolidation of suburbs, the design of collective public spaces and the management of transportation alternatives; and (3) considering requirements for the decontamination of strategic sites for redevelopment purposes.

One key observation emerges from the analysis of regulations as regards a requalification project for a suburban neighbourhood in the Québec City area: the new Design and Development Plan (DDP) contains a number of guidelines that encourage the consolidation of existing communities, and in particular first ring suburbs. Based on analysis and official information sources, the future will be characterized by a more flexible normative framework that supports suburban requalification.

The following are a few easing measures for the most restrictive regulations, along with some recommendations, expressed as objectives to be attained. As regards regulating zoning and subdivision:

1. Design a zoning and subdivision regulation that fosters suburban densification and consolidation pursuant to a harmonious diversity of uses and residential classifications. Flexible zoning regulations should permit the coexistence of non-constraining uses such as accessory housing, home offices and small businesses. This mixture should be permitted on a priority basis in the centre of neighbourhoods to establish "central poles," i.e. community service nodes that support the quality of daily living.
2. Ease parking requirements (minimum number of spaces) for densification, recycling and revitalization projects in strategic areas. Parking policy oriented toward decreasing parking spaces and dependence on the automobile. Revision of standards on the maximum number of spaces to be provided for new commercial developments, offices, institutions and community facilities located close to bus routes. The Québec City region must therefore consider reviewing its "minimum" standards for redevelopment projects, with priority being given to commercial axes consolidated near central poles and bus routes. In residential areas to be densified, on-street parking should be deemed a priority, with or without a sticker.
3. Focus on tools such as SPPs to support priority requalification projects, with regulations and standards adapted to specific intervention contexts, as well as restart incentives (investment, jobs, credits, etc.).

4. Maintain the policy on new subdivisions; its criteria objectively identify the constraints that development and sprawl impose on the environment and the community. This policy is designed to channel residential expansion from the viewpoint of sustainable development, factoring in the communities' ability to sustain such development. It fosters housing construction on vacant lots with existing services, along with recycling, expansion and densification. It is important that other authorities involved in land use planning, i.e. the Commission municipale du Québec (CMQ) [Quebec municipal board] and the neighbouring regional county municipalities (MRCs), support this policy and make it a metropolitan vision, to avoid further sprawl.

As regards acquiring public properties for consolidation purposes:

5. Ease the ministerial approval process concerning exchanges and acquisitions of public lands (such as school board properties) or the recycling of institutional buildings (such as schools). Easing the acquisition process could be given priority in areas subject to SPPs. This land acquisition or exchange authority should also give priority to the development of affordable housing projects, seniors' residences and social housing, in partnership with Technical Resource Groups and housing cooperatives.

As regards the environment and transportation alternatives:

6. Maintain and strengthen environmental regulations and standards at the provincial and municipal level. These two levels must work together to protect and enhance natural environments of interest. As a priority, authorities should restrict the privatization of access to watercourses (including by subdivision) to ensure the collective enjoyment of these public resources for future generations.
7. Ensure correlation, at every governance level, between the planning/consolidation of suburbs, the design of collective public spaces and the management of transportation alternatives. All authorities should unreservedly support and promote urban consolidation oriented toward alternative mass transit.
8. Consider requirements for the decontamination of strategic sites for redevelopment purposes.
9. Foster the construction of noise-abatement screens to reduce noise pollution in the vicinity of residential districts to be consolidated. The Ministère des transports du Québec (MTQ) [Quebec department of transport] and owners of businesses set up along highways (who benefit from traffic) could contribute to a fund to build screens on the approaches to vulnerable residential areas.

Finally, the Duberger requalification project illustrated in the report is insufficient to address all of the regulatory constraints involved in suburban redevelopment. A number of regulatory areas deserve investigation: protection of agricultural land and landscapes,

enhancement of built heritage, recycling of convent complexes, control of minimum housing density, etc. These are interesting avenues for further research into the regulatory frameworks in city planning.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the municipal merger in 2002, the greater Québec City area is undergoing an update of its planning tools. The Réseau de transport de la Capitale (RTC) [capital transportation network] submitted its mass transit strategic plan in early 2003, in the wake of the Ministère des Affaires municipales, du Sport et du Loisir (MAMSL) [Quebec department of municipal affairs, sport and recreation], which tabled its *Orientations gouvernementales en matière d'aménagement pour le territoire de la CMQ* [government directions for development in the CMQ] in late 2002. So 2002 was, literally, a year of building a new city, a new territory.

All of the directional and legal texts consulted in this study exercise a considerable influence on the regulatory frameworks of suburban requalification. This research therefore fits into a context of overthrowing provincial and municipal development regulations, thereby strengthening its relevance.

Between September 2002 and November 2003, GIRBa carried out an important participative planning exercise in cooperation with key stakeholders involved in area development. The mission was to design a development plan for first ring suburbs on the basis of a consensually created diagnosis and vision. This was achieved by linking approximately 40 activities (mini seminars, workshops, discussion groups, intensive design sessions) with about 60 partners from every governance level.

At the greater Québec City level: the CMQ, the RTC, the Commission de la Capitale Nationale (CCNQ) [Quebec national capital commission], MAMSL, the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) [Quebec housing corporation] and the City of Québec.

At the intermediate level: borough offices, school boards, Centres Locaux de Développement (CLDs) [local development centres], Centres locaux de services communautaires (CLSCs) [local community services centres]. At the level of community groups and citizens: a number of targeted groups of seniors, adolescents, immigrants and single mothers.

Despite the absence of the provincial departments of transport and the environment, everyone participated in numerous working sessions involving representatives of the three levels of government. There were extensive discussions of the obstacles posed by the regulation of suburban requalification and its regulatory frameworks.

Research Highlight

Requalification of Suburbs and Regulatory Frameworks: Current Situation and Easing Measures

To ensure consistency between regulatory and normative bodies, discussion and sustained collaboration must be maintained between all urban regulation stakeholders. The successes of this participative action include the initiation of dialogue and discussion of this nature between those involved in development at the different governance levels. It is clear that a number of participants in the process have "appropriated" a range of collectively developed diagnoses, strategies, solutions and activities, as demonstrated by DDP guidelines in the area of consolidating first ring suburbs. Yet the premise of this research was that numerous regulatory pitfalls make requalification of these communities difficult.

A review of Québec City guidelines indicates that a number of these obstructions will be avoided. The implementation of tools such as SPPs is proving to be particularly meaningful, since these tools recognize the need to adapt regulation to specific contexts rather than focusing on a regulatory framework with "universal" application. The era of functionalist regulations that apply uniformly to vast areas of transformation without any acknowledgement of particularities or specificities seems to be well and truly over.

According to regulatory experts, the only regulatory framework remaining to overhaul is translating clear guidelines and development vision, which must achieve consensus among managers and the population.

In view of this study, other regulatory areas might merit investigation, including the protection of agricultural land and landscapes and the enhancement of built heritage, including convent complexes. These are interesting avenues for the pursuit of further research into transferring knowledge into action.

CMHC Project Manager: Kevin Hughes

Consultant: Geneviève Vachon and Carole Després
Groupe Interdisciplinaire de recherche sur les banlieues (GIRBa)
École d'Architecture Université Laval

Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

To find more *Research Highlights* plus a wide variety of information products, visit our website at

www.cmhc.ca

or contact:

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
700 Montreal Road
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0P7

Phone: 1 800 668-2642

Fax: 1 800 243-9274

©2006, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Printed in Canada
Produced by CMHC 25-08-06

OUR WEBSITE ADDRESS: www.cmhc.ca

Although this information product reflects housing experts' current knowledge, it is provided for general information purposes only. Any reliance or action taken based on the information, materials and techniques described are the responsibility of the user. Readers are advised to consult appropriate professional resources to determine what is safe and suitable in their particular case. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation assumes no responsibility for any consequence arising from use of the information, materials and techniques described.